

DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE TEACHING PERFORMANCE THROUGH SELF-OBSERVATION TECHNIQUE

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ABSTRACT

This research explores one of the essential teaching techniques; reflective practice (RP) which effectively helps teachers to observe, evaluate and develop their teaching performance inside the classroom through self-observation. The researchers first define reflective teaching practice and specifically explain the procedures of self-observation and how it might help teachers to become effectively more conscious of the challenges they may encounter inside classroom and how to deal with them. The researchers also discuss Iraqi teachers' opinions and recommendations after recording three sound tracks of three English language teachers in secondary schools in the city of Al-Nassiriyah. Tasks and topics of questions that are set for the observation and discussion are also explained.

The purpose of this research is to find out how reflective practice (RP) through self-observation, that investigates the performance of Iraqi teachers of English by audio recording their lessons, helps them know how to teach, evaluate, improve and develop their performance inside classroom. Those recordings or sound tracks are the materials of the evaluation checklist in this research.

The tool of the research is three sound tracks recorded in three secondary schools in the city of Al-Nassiriyah. The three volunteer teachers were asked to review their tracks and to fill a checklist which represents the teaching techniques the teacher has to do in a model lesson. After analysing their answers, it has been found out that the teachers had been stressful and more embarrassed because of being recorded. Secondly, their anxiety at the time when they were being recorded led them lose self-confidence as they thought they might make mistakes inside classrooms. The researchers have also anticipated some of the reasons that prevent Iraqi teachers from applying such a technique. It has been also noticed that supervisors visit teachers once or twice a year and there are no training sessions that encourage such kind of self-observation.

The researchers recommend that:

- *Teaching, like any other profession, should be updated and enhanced by the use of technological devices such as live lesson recordings.*
- *Training courses on how to conduct self-observation techniques by teachers and to how share constructive criticism should be worked on.*

The researchers hope that such a step towards self-observation and the checklist used can be adopted by the Ministry of Education as a means for developing teachers' performance inside classrooms.

Key words: *reflective teaching, self observation*

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

When a person is engaged in an interview by a radio or television reporter and he intends later to check what he said in that interview, he can identify the points of strength and weakness of his actual performance. People do such procedure in order to personally evaluate, improve, and develop their future performance. Similarly, when teachers know that their performance in front of students is being recorded and observed by somebody else, they definitely try to do their best. This section introduces a theoretical background for the research topic in order to go ahead in carrying out the research procedures.

1.1 Reflective Practice: A Theoretical Background

Indeed, there are many procedures being used to observe teachers' behaviour during instruction. One of these procedures is Reflective Practice (RP). Oysterman (1990: 134) defines reflective practice as a challenging, focused, and critical assessment of one's behaviour as a means towards developing one's own craftsmanship. Christodoulou (2010)⁽¹⁾ also states that self-observation is a method where the teacher him/herself is the key person of inquiry and further scrutiny of his/her teaching without any help from others. Self-observation is introduced in this research as a systematic approach of the evaluation and management of behaviour in order to achieve a better understanding and control over that behaviour.

Farrell (2008:1) explains that the use of reflective practice in teacher professional development is based on the belief that teachers can improve their own teaching by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences. This means that teachers can develop their teaching performance through investigation and reflective teaching via the information that they gather later through a systematic process to gain a deeper understanding of what is going on in their classroom either by a checklist or a questionnaire. This method can have its effect when a teacher can record his

or her lessons and modify all the possible details. It is also "a future reference he or she can go through for self-evaluation". (Bhatta, 2011)⁽²⁾

In this section, the researchers specifically focus on reflective teaching practice with self-observation, which is very important to "enable teachers to document either the whole or part of the lessons." (Christodoulou, 2010:27). It means that it can show accurate details that cannot be seen otherwise. It is worth saying that the reflective practice done by the supervisors once or more during the academic year is different in the sense that such observation is not that kind of sharing or exchanging reflectively what has been happening but only to evaluate what has been done.

One of the essential purposes of the observation is to help teachers reconsider their classroom behaviour which may unconsciously become habitual.. Teachers positively need to change their teaching attitudes and not to glue themselves in traditional ways of teaching or managing their classes. Head and Taylor (1997: 186) elaborate that most of language - teaching classroom is ritual behaviour rather than principled behaviour. The problem with this kind of teaching is that our classrooms habitually follow a series of behaviours that are accomplished through teaching in the same way. In such a case, teachers need to update their procedures of teaching day by day. Observation can lead teachers away from ritual behaviour towards principled behaviour. This can be conducted by making them conscious about what and how they perform their teaching inside their classrooms.

According to Fanselow (1988: 116, cited in Gebhard, 2005)⁽³⁾, we can see teaching differently by trying out new behaviours to see what happens which consequently affords chances to construct, reconstruct, and revise teaching performance. Once teachers try new things, they can compare these things with what they usually do, and by this comparison they can see their teaching differently, including their ideas about teaching and learning. Through this process, teachers can review what has been achieved in a lesson report, which is defined by

⁽¹⁾https://is.muni.cz/th/266245/.../DPIva_Chris_todoulou.pdf

⁽²⁾<https://neltachoutari.wordpress.com/.../self-directed-prof...>

⁽³⁾www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume9/ej34/ej34a4/

Richards and Lockhart (1996: 9) as a structured inventory or list which enables teachers to describe their recollections of the main features of a lesson. A teacher can describe what happened during a lesson, which it is usually done shortly after the lesson even if the account is not precise. Richard & Lockhart, 1997 (cited in Christodoulou, 2010:25) claim that the main purpose of report writing is to provide the teacher with a quick and simple procedure for regularly watching what had been happening during a lesson, how much time was spent on different parts of a lesson, and how effective the lesson was.

Teachers may not have all the answers about knowledge of teaching and learning process. Mullock (2006, cited in Mattos, 2013:2) defines teachers' knowledge, or pedagogical knowledge base as the accumulated knowledge about the act of teaching, including the goals, procedures, and strategies that form the basis for what teachers do in the classroom. In this case, there are two types of pedagogical knowledge, the pedagogical content knowledge and the general pedagogical knowledge. For the first one, Shulman, 1987 (cited in Malderez and Wedell, 2007:18) suggests that the teacher should know the techniques of the subject, which he or she is going to use in teaching this subject. It means that teachers should have the capability of using different techniques to make their learners understand the subject. On the other hand, general pedagogical knowledge is the managing of the classroom and assessment techniques. This refers to how teachers manage classrooms and how they assess their learners according to the techniques used.

However, teachers are actually different in their viewpoints. Berliner, 1987 (cited in Richards and Farrell 2005:8) mentions that experienced teachers manage their work differently from novices who have four years or less in service because they know what typical classroom activities can be used and they expect problems and create solutions. This means that experienced teachers have the ability to solve the problems and to find relevant solutions to the implications concerned in their classrooms. Thus, reflective teaching practice through self-observation and external evaluation can empower teachers with techniques on how to achieve the best way of teaching.

1.2 Enhancing Teaching Practice Performance through Self-Observation

Self-observation could perhaps lead teachers towards being able to reflect in-action. According to Schön (1983, 1987, cited in Gebhard, 2005), the more we explore, and the more we are able to see our teaching practices differently, the more we develop our abilities to reflect in-action and reflect on-action. Moreover, Stanley (1998:585, cited in Gebhard, 2005) says that reflective teaching is what reflective practitioners do when they look at their work in the moment (reflect-in-action) or in retrospect (reflect-on-action) in order to examine the reasons and beliefs underlying their actions and generate alternative actions for the future. These actions can convey positive or negative pictures for teachers to support the positive ones and to reconstruct the negative ones.

Self-observation provides opportunities not only for experienced teachers but also for the pre-service English language teachers to learn how to develop their teaching practices. According to Eröz-Tuğa (2013, cited in Mercado,2014:65), pre-service English language teachers in Turkey not only gained insight into their own strengths and weaknesses after watching video records, but also displayed conscious efforts to make improvements. He highlights the value of repeated viewing of videos and the importance of clarifying the expectations and the assessment criteria for teaching performance; this means that those teachers can review, notice and investigate their performance video records until they gain their understanding of their teaching strengths and weaknesses.

Systematically, teachers can get benefits from self-observation. Richards and Farrell (2005, cited in Christodoulou, 2010:25) point out that these benefits can firstly allow the teacher to make a record of teaching which can be used for various purposes. Secondly, they can provide an objective account of one's teaching. Thirdly, they can help teachers better understand their own instructional practices and make decisions about the practices they are not aware of and might wish to change. Fourthly, they can develop much reflective views of teaching and finally it is teacher initiated.

The above benefits can provide opportunities for teachers to improve their teaching performance in their classrooms. Teachers have to accept the self-awareness challenge of always being on the same point because they now know where they are and can begin to develop

themselves constructively and successfully. It can also raise teachers' awareness of the weaknesses and strengths of their knowledge and attitudes.

1.3 Guidelines for Self-Observation

There are some certain guidelines to carry out self-observation by audio recording. One of these guidelines is the reliance on the position of the recorder. Richards and Farrell, 2005, cited in Christodoulou, 2010:27) suggest that the place of the recorder or any means of new technology can be placed either on the teacher's desk in the centre of the room, or the teacher can have a microphone. It is not necessary where the recorder is but most importantly the quality of the recordings and how distant the pupils are from the recorder.

Lunn, 2012⁽⁴⁾ suggests that the judgement of the performance for both students and teachers can have the answers to the following questions:

- Do I teach as I think I teach?
- Do I speak as slowly and clearly, as I think I do?
- What does it feel like to be one of my lessons?
- What do students do when I am not looking/ giving them attention?
- In addition, most importantly how can I improve my pedagogy?

The answers to these five questions can adjust the way the teachers present their lessons. First, teachers can adopt new principles and methodologies inside classroom. For example, teachers can use ways such as students- centred methodology to conduct a lesson and to make the students to be the source of information. Second, teachers need to be conscious about their slowness and clearance while they are speaking inside the classroom in order not to let students miss the activities of the lesson. Thirdly, teachers need to create a relax atmosphere inside the classroom in order to make a good relationship with their students. Fourthly, teachers need to pay attention to understand what the students say, how they use the language and how they complete their tasks. Finally, teachers need to improve their teaching after they observe the shortcomings that are shown in their teaching recordings.

The second step of this procedure is how to give post-observation evaluation. Tóth (2012:37) recommends that after tape-recording or videoing a lesson, teachers should evaluate their own instruction-giving skills in the same way as they do when observing their mentor. The teacher, who wants to see what it is going on inside his or her lesson, needs to focus on points of strength and how to correct points of weakness for the future. Richards and Lockhart (1994, cited in Tóth, 2012: 48) suggest that towards the end of teachers' teaching practice, they need to ask themselves questions in order to fix their pedagogy. Finally, Prodromou (1991, cited in Çakir, 2010:7) proposes that preparing a self-observation checklist will be a practical instrument for helping the teacher become more aware of the elusive aspects of teaching. External evaluation by other observers can be a means of critical significance.

1.4 The Aim of the Research

This research aims at finding out how reflective teaching after self-observation enables teachers to improve, evaluate and develop their teaching performance inside the classroom.

1.5 The Value of the Research

The procedure adopted by the researchers may fill a gap in the educational supervision process and be an aid tool for assessing teachers' performance not only in English but also in other subject fields.

SECTION TWO: THE PROCEDURES

This section shows the procedures carried out by the researchers; how lessons are recorded, how checklists are designed, and how post observation evaluation is conducted.

2.1 Lesson Audio Recording

Three English lessons were audio recorded at three secondary schools in the city of Al-Nassiriyah. The three teachers later listened to their audio clips and then filled up an evaluation checklist.

2.2 Evaluation Checklist

The evaluation checklist appears below has been used as an end-of-teaching investigation and self assessment.

⁽⁴⁾<https://earlyreflections1.wordpress.com/2012/.../10/self->

Personal information:

Name of the teacher and years of service	
Have you ever been recorded while teaching your class?	
Name of the school	
Date of conducting the observation	

Class information:

Number of the students	
Grade	
Name of the course	
Title of the unit / lesson	
Length of tape-recording	

Self-assessment checklist:

No.	Teaching Skill	Yes	No
1	Starting and ending the lesson on time		
2	Helping students to talk during the lesson		
3	Linking the topic with the previous lesson		
4	Using games and songs		
5	Giving examples to clarify the lesson		
6	Using simple language		
7	Calling students with their names		
8	Distributing handouts among students		
9	Using short sentences		
10	Using visual aids		
11	Speaking slowly and clearly		
12	Using pair and group work		
13	Using the target language		
14	Making use of the board		
15	Timing each activity as recommended		
16	Interacting positively with students		
17	Repeating instruction in a different way		
18	Speaking too much		
19	Focusing only on teaching for testing		
20	Making immediate assessment		

It is worth noting that the purpose of this assessment checklist is not to calculate how many teachers answer with 'Yes' and how many teachers answer with 'No' but rather to see how teachers could be motivated by this technique to evaluate their teaching skills by themselves.

SECTION THREE: RESULTS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

It has been found out that the teachers were confused and more careful about their teaching practices than usual. Below are the participants' viewpoints after viewing their audio recordings:

- After this experience, I am going to adjust the pitch of my voice.

- I should give many opportunities to students to participate in the lesson.
- My voice must be slower than I am doing in my usual teaching.
- It is such a technique that is helpful to revise the way the teacher teaches.
- It can be considered as good and useful technique.
- I need to correct my mistakes in using short sentences.
- I need to improve my spoken language in front my class.

The observations also reveal that all the three teachers started teaching by reviewing their previous lessons and they communicatively interacted with their students. Secondly, they sometimes used visual aids but they never paid attention for timing each activity. Thirdly, they never used games or songs in the classrooms. However, they used examples for more practice. Due to the large number of classes, walking around the students was not possible. Finally, all the teachers used the board and group work repeating the instructions of the subjects in different ways.

Unfortunately, few teachers expressed their desire to participate in this observation. There are some reasons behind this position. They may feel embarrassed because of being recorded, observed and then evaluated by others. They think that this procedure might cause loss of self-confidence if they make mistakes through classroom activities. They used to be observed and thus evaluated by supervisors for only current practices in the classrooms without any post observation recorded review. Finally, there are no specific sessions in the training programmes on the advantages of self-observation techniques.

Suggestions

One of the suggested solutions for the challenges of applying reflective teaching practice technique is to make teachers believe that teaching is not a private profession and it should be a public profession as Richardson (2000: 10) says. It is very important for teachers to know that teaching is not only conducting in close doors. It should be opened to new technology such as audio or videotaping to their classrooms. The second suggestion is to take into consideration providing specific training sessions about self-observation for novice and experienced teachers about which approach works better and how it measures achievement. Moreover, Mercado (2014:73) suggests that self-

observation may not be possible unless a conscious decision is made at the institutional level to promote it within a well-defined professional development framework. The last suggestion is to start with school's teachers as a model to observe each other and try to convey this procedure to others.

Recommendation

The researchers conclude that reflective teaching practice can help teachers develop their understanding of teaching through self-observation by recording their presentations. Self-observation can make teachers be effectively aware of their teaching in the classroom. Teachers can gain many opportunities from self-observation through this judgmental observation. The judgmental and evaluative observing can reduce embarrassment. With the reflective teaching practice procedures, teachers can undergo their own professional development and thus help the supervisors and administrators in their career. Hopefully, Iraqi teachers might change their negative attitudes toward self observation through using audio tapes procedures to review and then adjust their teaching practice.

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تطوير أداء التدريس الانعكاسي من خلال الملاحظة الشخصية

الملخص

يستكشف البحث إحدى تقنيات التدريس الأساسية وهي التدريس الانعكاسي الذي يساعد المدرسين على ملاحظة وتقويم وتطوير أدائهم التدريسي داخل الصف من خلال الملاحظة الشخصية. يُعرف الباحثان مفهوم التدريس الانعكاسي وإجراءات الملاحظة الشخصية وكيف بالامكان أن تُساعد المدرسين ليكونوا أكثر فاعلية عند إدراكهم للتحديات التي يواجهونها داخل الصف وكيفية التعامل معها. كذلك يعرض الباحثان آراء المدرسين العراقيين بعد تسجيل ثلاثة دروس صوتياً لمدرسي اللغة الانكليزية في المدارس الثانوية في مدينة الناصرية. ومن ثم تم توضيح المهام والمواضيع المُحددة للملاحظة.

إن الغرض من هذا البحث هو لاكتشاف كيف يُساعد التدريس الانعكاسي من خلال الملاحظة الشخصية المدرسين على تنظيم كيف يُدرسون ويُقومون ومن ثم يُطورون أدائهم التدريسي. وقد تم اعتماد التسجيلات الصوتية كأداة لتحديد فقرات استمارة التقويم. تضمنت أداة البحث ثلاث تسجيلات ومن ثم تم توجيه المدرسين المتطوعين للتسجيل بالاستماع إليها وملء استمارة التقويم التي تضمنت أهم التقنيات التي يجب على المدرس استخدامها في الدرس النموذجي. وبعد تحليل الإجابات توصل الباحثان إلى أن المدرسين كانوا مُجهدين ومُخرجين بسبب تسجيل أدائهم. ثانياً، أدى قلقهم الواضح في أثناء التسجيل إلى فقدانهم الثقة بالنفس نتيجة لخشيتهم من ارتكاب الأخطاء داخل الصف. لاحظ الباحثان كذلك أسباب عدم رغبة المدرسين العراقيين من استخدام هذه التقنية إذ أنهم اعتادوا على أن يكون تقييمهم من قبل المشرفين مرة أو مرتين في السنة علاوة على أن الدورات التدريبية تفتقر للدروس التي تُشجع على اعتماد هذا النوع من الملاحظة.

يوصي الباحثان على ضرورة تعزيز التدريس بتقنيات حديثة باستخدام وسائل تقنية مثل التسجيلات الحية وتضمين الدورات التدريبية بدروس عن كيفية إجراء الملاحظة الشخصية وتقبل النقد البناء. ويأمل الباحثان بأن هكذا خطوة نحو الملاحظة الشخصية واستخدام استمارة التقويم قد تكون ذات فائدة كوسيلة لتطوير أداء المدرسين داخل الصف.